
The Concept of Totalitarian Education in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

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Abstract

The most profound issue directly concerned with the present and future of human civilization might be education. The aim of this paper is to expose the profound undermining effect of the totalitarian system of education and politics on wiping out Stephen Dedalus's (the protagonist of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) individuality and free choice which is about to reduce him to an ideological subject. In this research, the German thinker and philosopher, Hanna Arendt's political theory, which is an outcome of ideology, including her critique of totalitarianism and its destructive impacts on individuals is employed by focusing on the ambivalent function of the educational institution represented in James Joyce's novel *A portrait of an artist as a young man*. The research also uncovers the reality of transforming the schoolrooms, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, into ideological places sowing certain doctrines and codes in ready to-grab minds. The totalitarian structure of education strips Stephens and his schoolmates of the privilege of experiencing their childhood and implants ideological principles in their minds by depriving them the right of being educated in the private domain. Stephen Dedalus represents an isolated sensitive student who oscillates between his private inspiring world and the cruel public one. This paper also tends to highlight the roles of a totalitarian system, in creating a unified customized identity for all individuals along with Stephen's process of identity creation and its transformation. It is found out that, due to the totalitarian system, Stephen through an increasing sense of uprootedness and superfluousness besides a state of loneliness could free himself from

the social, familial and religious attachments. He could adopt a new independent trend of life and art.

Introduction

The concept of education and its significant impacts on society has been one of the controversial issues in the history of mankind. Many thinkers and philosophers ranging from Socrates to the most recent prominent figures have dedicated a great deal of attention to this concept since it is always regarded as one of the most fundamental questions pertaining directly to the present and future of human society. The establishment of modern educational institutions aiming to produce literate, knowledgeable, disciplined and social subjects has been celebrated by almost all progressive members of society. However; several critiques have criticized these institutions questioning their much emphasized goals.

Education is supposed to provide a set of practices and activities in order to equip young people to participate actively in society and to lead them to a better life by assuming their responsibilities and rights. Taking for granted that education is supposed to create good citizens, the main issue here is the definition of good. As places devoted for educating the young generation, classrooms can function as ideological spaces implanting specific principles in ready to-grab minds. Depending on the dominant ideology, education varies in different states and conditions. As a scrutinizing thinker who highlighted the role of education in society and associated it with political issues, Hannah Arendt made it crystal clear that the totalitarian system of education deprives students of the right to experience childhood and implants ideological (even direct political) issues in their minds through denying them the right to be educated in the private realm.

As a political system, totalitarianism forms a political tyranny aiming to gain domination over subjects. In a totalitarian society, freedom, in both private and public realms, is an illusion. The authority obliterates individuality and free choice and reduces the individuals to ideological subjects. This dominating policy exists in all forms of regimes and systems; however, its best manifestation is a totalitarian system in which the process of implanting the ideology, terror, subjugation and homogenizing occurs conspicuously.

A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by James Joyce is one of the prominent and controversial novels of the 20th century which has attracted many critics' attentions even years after its publication. The novel contains several significant issues associated with the relationship between the artist and his society. In Modern novels, "The present suddenly seemed cut off from the past, alienated by the war and with it the loss of values and beliefs that had underpinned previous assumptions about a permanent and universal structure to life." (Parsons 68)

The protagonist of the novel, Stephen Dedalus, represents an isolated sensitive young man who oscillates between his private inspiring world and the harsh public one. He undergoes serious transformations throughout the novel which lead him to adopt a new independent trend of life. There have been several readings of this novel regarding various issues represented; however, the issue of education and its impacts on the young generation has been overshadowed by other issues. As a macrocosm of a totalitarian system, the institution of education in this novel which manifests itself in the classroom signifies this ruthless and brutal method. "The overall narrative is united thematically, and the story that is driving events traces with increasing insistence Stephen's growing alienation from the inflexible social, cultural, and creative environments in Ireland that threaten first to circumscribe and then to stifle the imagination of the young artist." (Fagnoli and Gillespie 136)

Regarding Arendt's concept of politics as an outcome of ideology, it is desirable to apply her political theory including her critique of totalitarianism and its destructive impacts on individuals in *A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* focusing on the ambivalent function of the educational institution represented in the novel. This paper also tends to highlight the roles of educational institution in the novel, functioning as a totalitarian system, in creating a unified customized identity for all individuals through implanting ideological principles along with Stephen's process of identity creation and its transformation. It also spotlights the reactions of Stephen, as a young potential artist, to this tyrant system, examines his attempts to either succumb to or rebel against the system, and reveals the outcome of his reaction in order to generalize it for his kind, the artists of the society. In doing so, this paper employs the viewpoint of the German thinker

and philosopher, Hannah Arendt, on the concepts of education and totalitarianism.

Theoretical Framework

Hannah Arendt was one of the most famous German philosophers and political thinkers of the 20th century who is regarded as a critic of Modernism. As an influential political thinker, Arendt is mostly known for her significant ideas on different political concepts including revolution, violence, and totalitarianism. In addition, she paid a particular attention to the concept of education and its connection with political issues as well.

Hannah Arendt challenges the instrumentalization of education for the sake of the ideological political codes aiming to intimidate and consequently to subjugate the individuals. In *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (1961), she makes distinction between education and learning, in a way that “education, as distinguished from learning must have a predictable end. ... One cannot educate without at the same time teaching; an education without learning is empty ... but one can easily teach without educating ... [or without] becoming educated” (195-6). She considers education as a term employed for the process of teaching children from primary school to graduation from high school. However, as a secondary consideration, learning occurs as children are being educated. Therefore, while education can merely occur between equals and cannot be dependent on authority, learning can occur both in the private and public sphere. In fact, being in a learning environment enables the students to learn from each other. In addition to Arendt’s prominent discourse of the consequent dangers of a confusion of the private and the public realm is another significant factor. For Arendt, the activity of education pertains to the private domain or, more specifically, it is a process that reflects the journey students must take between private and public.

Emphasizing the relationship between education and the private sphere, Arendt classifies three basic assumptions that stem from the undisputed assertion of its public role. First, the assumption which highlights that children are not in need of authority; second, that educators do not need to be symbols of authority through their proficiency; and third, that learning can be replaced by doing. These three factors justify the consequences of consenting with the dangers

of programs that attempt to produce citizens in the classroom. New to the world, students must have a space in which they discover themselves before being challenged through principles. The miraculous time of childhood is a precious time of dreams, discovery, and hope. In *The Crisis of Education* (1954), Arendt states that, "Insofar as the child is not yet acquainted with the world, he must be gradually introduced to it; insofar as he is new, care must be taken that this new thing comes to fruition in relation to the world as it is." (Arendt 189)

The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951) is one of Arendt's famous works in which she clarifies the concept of totalitarianism focusing on its characteristics, impacts and results. As a political tyranny which makes tremendous efforts to dominate and has an insatiable appetite for power, totalitarianism forces its ideological rules and principals on individuals in order to intensify its authority. Disseminating ideological propaganda through the media, totalitarianism depends on mass acceptance and support. It also subdues the rebellious individuals who criticize the system or stand in its way violently without being questioned and criticized by other society members.

Analysis

The protagonist of the novel, Stephen Dedalus, is a sensitive thoughtful young boy, who starts studying at Clongowes boarding school where he is confronted with various issues that make him undergo several fundamental transformations over the course of the novel. In this novel, according to Attridge Joyce employs words to combine dissimilar situations and backgrounds "Stephen's alienated, individual subjectivity, the British-style public school culture of Clongowes, misunderstandings between religious communities, the conflicts of the Dublin political world in the years after Parnell's fall, and the global reach of the British empire" (Attridge 257). Stephen is bewildered about the strange world around and grows a gradual sense of alienation similar to the one felt by Joyce himself along with a number of his contemporary literary peers at the beginning of the 20th century. His estrangement which prevents him from participation in the any group work refers to his difference and aloofness. The novel highlights the author's standpoint toward the estranging Modern era he lives in. "His alienation from established Irish politics, the Revival and the Irish literary scene in general had progressively deepened." (Gibson 54)

James Joyce invites the reader's attention to the philosophical sense of education; just as the gap between past and future which demands avoiding instrumentalizing any feature of the human domain, here children. In this novel, education which is supposed to be fundamental in defining the gap between private and public spheres and preparing the young as well as the world for this journey functions as means of misguidance. Joyce clarifies that modern man no longer values the significance of the difference between the private and public, which endangers both domains. His argument is an evaluation of the desire to liberate the private domain from boundaries of authority in the way it did so to the public domain. It is not reasonable to put the young ones into schools in order to allow a rigid ideological domain, which is experienced as isolated as well as alienated, to transfer all responsibilities. Joyce indicates that education is not an ideological instrument and children are the very ends in themselves not the means of any ideology. As human beings, children cannot be limited to their status as future citizens.

In line with the separation of the private and public domains, each needs various approaches as each employed different, yet equally fundamental, roles. Ideological practices pertain to public spaces and must not enter the private domain. As a result, the students are preferred to adhere to the central qualities to human interaction including thinking and judging rather than merely doing in skill-oriented pedagogy. In such a situation, students are deprived of the chance to form ideas and realize the shared background that identifies the public ethos in which they live. These students are neither old enough, and yet prepared for the confusion of uncertainty, nor the responsibility of this domain ought to be forced to them. In *The Crisis in Education*, Hannah Arendt clarifies more her concept of education by declaring the following:

Education is a process which facilitates the journey from the safety of home to the realm of public. Students are introduced to the world through being educated in the classroom. As a result, an educational crisis is a crisis in human condition demonstrating the lack of attention to the certain needs and nature of children. This need equally functions in the private and public domain. In education they [the parents] assume responsibility for both, for the life and development of the child and for the continuance of the world. ... They may indeed come into conflict with each other. The child requires

special protection and care so that nothing destructive may happen to him from the world. ... The world, too, needs protection to keep it from being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that bursts upon it with each new generation. (Arendt 186)

The educational system presented in the novel is a totalitarian system aiming to implant and internalize the dominant ideology in the students. For instance, it enforces its domination through frightening descriptions of inferno preached by the teacher-priest. Besides the physical punishment and violence, this system adopts a more efficient policy since totalitarianism is not content to govern by “external means, namely, through the state and a machinery of violence; thanks to its peculiar ideology and the role assigned to it in this apparatus of coercion, totalitarianism has discovered a means of dominating and terrorizing human beings from within” (The Origins of Totalitarianism 325). The individuality of the students in the classroom is denied in favour of a unified regulated body which disapproves any difference and resistance. The students, as the members of this society, are bound together and are supposed to maintain the situation which guarantees their existence.

One of the signs of unifying strategies of the system manifests itself in the public prayers. The students have to obey the unifying formulaic prayer regardless of the individual beliefs and demanding. In fact, the prescribed unifying prayer prevents them from keeping their individuality. However, Stephen prefers addressing God directly. The chaplain’s clear and formulaic prayer contrasts with his own quietly murmured prayer for his family’s well-being.

The tough system and the teachers’ harsh behavior besides inflexible boring subjects make Stephen so frustrated that he starts meditating on himself, the cosmos and God instead of studying the educational materials. The system facilitates the process of his alienation through ignoring his individuality as well as differences and enforcing to merge him with society/masses. The harsh behavior of the perfect of studying, Father Dolan highlights the function of ideology in terrorizing subjects and denying their self-esteem. This terror intensifies the power of the system, implanting subjugation among the subjects. Father Dolan functions as an agent of ideology spreading terror, thus says, “Any boys want flogging, Father Arnall?” (43). His aim is to get the act of punishment fulfilled, through punishing both

culprits and innocents, in order to produce submissive subjects out of fear. The physical punishment is a fearful experience for Stephen who has done nothing wrong. "A hot burning stinging tingling blow like the loud cracks of a broken stick made his trembling hand crumple together like a leaf in the fire: and at the sound and the pain scolding tears were driven into his eyes" (Joyce 45). As an agent of the totalitarian system of education, Father Dolan, "treats the victims of his aggression as though they were rebels, guilty of high treason..." (Arendt 420). His method of subjugating the students through threat and punishment creates a ubiquitous situation of fear. "Father Dolan will be in every day to see if anybody, any lazy idle little loafer wants flogging. Everyday. Every day" (46). Stephen thinks that his punishment was cruel and unfair; therefore, he goes to the rector's office and denounces Father Dolan. However, the rector claims that it was definitely a mistake since Father Dolan did not know that Stephen's glasses had been broken. When Stephen tells him that he informed Father Dolan, the rector does not heed and his response is a smile which emphasizes that Father Dolan did not understand.

Totalitarianism is never content to rule by external means, namely, through the state and a machinery of violence. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt asserts that, "The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instil convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any" (468). The institution of education is the manifestation of this idea. The young generation who is supposed to serve the society in the future is taught and trained under the control of the system at school. The ideology of the system is disseminated, preached, discussed, agreed upon, and finally internalized through education in the classroom. Behind the facades of ostensible power of a totalitarian system lies an ideology which determines every single aspect of the society.

The consistent arbitrariness caused by the totalitarian system negates the individual's freedom and those who are brave enough to question the tyranny are punished severely. Arendt emphasizes that "Theoretically, the choice of opposition remains in totalitarian regimes too; but such freedom is almost invalidated if committing a voluntary act only assures a punishment that everyone else may have to bear anyway." (433) For the time being, since Stephen is not courageous enough to rebel and face the troubles caused by the totalitarian system, he identifies with someone whose qualities could

compensate for his own lacks. Stephen shapes his own identity through his identification with the hero of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a literary character who is a pursuer of revenge and a righter of wrong. He is disappointed by the unfair system and desires to be an active adventurous hero. This shows his dissatisfaction with his present situation, yearning for a different mode of life marked with disobedience and revolt.

Committing sins is another manifestation of rebellion in the young artist as Joyce comments on Stephens feeling after committing his first sin “A cold lucid indifference reigned in his soul. At his first violent sin he had felt a wave of vitality pass out of him and had feared to find his body or his soul maimed by the excess” (97). His joy does not last long due to the domination of the internalized behavioural codes that manifest themselves in his guilty conscious. His sins along with his later shame, regret, and confusion pave the way for questioning the ideology and becoming more alienated. From one hand, he is physically satisfied through committing those sins and on the other; his guilty conscious tortures him severely. The result of this contradiction is later manifested in his disobedience and rebellion. Gradually, the incompatibility of some of his doings with religious beliefs taught and acquired through education makes him more alienated and more like a rebel.

Totalitarian ideology is a means of terror than of persuasion. Terror is applied to eliminate opposition. Arendt believes that there is a direct link between ideology and terror which is merely realized through a totalitarian system. In fact, a totalitarian system prefers the use of indirect menacing hints against non-conformists to the direct threats since the veiled action is more terrifying and has more psychological impacts on individuals. In the novel, the retreat of the day of St. Francis Xavier, a patron saint of the college provides the educators with a chance to subdue the students through terrifying them. The totalitarian system intimidates its members in order to make them *subjugated individuals*. Father Arnall’s sermon about hell illustrates a terrifying graphic image of it. Recounting Lucifer and his fellow angles’ original sin, he describes the torments of hell beginning with depicting its lethal air, spoiled by the disgusting odour of rotten bodies. This terrifying sermon affects Stephen so much that he is paralyzed with fear. He, as a potential rebel, is more intimidated than the indifferent submissive members since he blames himself for his

doubts and impending rebellion against the accepted norms. He knows that the hell described in the sermon is his destination but he cannot leave his rebellion and temptations behind.

In a totalitarian society, private and public freedom is nothing but an illusion. Masses are so fascinated by the propaganda that they have internalized the ideological principles and even become the agents of their own subjugation. Totalitarianism is merely possible, Arendt claims, in societies in which masses have replaced classes as a result of class merging. This system denies the concept of individuality aiming to homogenize all members regardless of their differences. The supremacy of the dominant ideology besides his inner desire for sin enforces Stephen to adopt a new rigorous spiritual discipline in order to counteract the negative effects of his committed sins. The system makes him internalize the ideological codes through the sermon and he starts practicing an arduous self-discipline. However, what surprises him is that all of his "prayers and fasts availed him little for the suppression of anger at hearing his mother sneeze or at being disturbed in his devotions" (145). Stephen's rigorous discipline and his perseverance attract the director's attention and make him ask if Stephen ever felt that he had a vocation. Then, in order to make him more interested, the director declares that, "No king or emperor on this earth has the power of the priest of God. No angel or archangel in heaven, no saint, not even the Bleed Virgin herself has the power of a priest of God ..." (151). He asserts that the power of executive agents of the ideology is superior to the principles and the constitutional rules of the same ideology.

The insufficient knowledge of teachers and their inability to answer the critical and basic questions of the modern students is another significant issue indicated by Joyce in this novel. When asked a philosophical question, the dean of the school evades providing him with a logical answer, saying:

These questions are very profound Mr. Dedalus, said the dean. It is like looking down from the cliffs of Moher into the depths. Many go down to the depths and never come up. Only the trained diver can go down to those depths and explore them and come to the surface again. (Joyce 159)

The repetition of the word depths signifies the superficiality of the dean who lacks the essential knowledge to guide the modern thirsty to know student and provide him with proper constructive ideas. The

dean is even unwilling to accept his lack of knowledge and attempts to divert the conversation in order to conceal his incapability. In so far, the crisis in education reminds the loss of the world that exists depending on human interaction and plurality, the very condition needed for proper citizens. Accordingly, Stephen by the end of the novel; *“the narrative records Stephen’s progressive disillusionment with the central institutions defining the nature of Irish- Catholic society: the family, the church, and the nationalist movement.”* (Fargnoli and Gillespie 136)

Isolation is a condition in which the capacity of an individual for action is unfulfilled and frustrated by the destructive effects of totalitarianism. An increasing sense of uprootedness and superfluousness besides a state of loneliness free an individual from his social attachment. Denying any religious faith, as the effect of education he has received, Stephen tells his friends that he will quit studying in order to pursue a new trend of life. He decides to follow his artistic ambition instead of studying and through obeying the dictum *“I will not serve”* refuses any ideology that is enforced to him in the system. Stephen’s disobedience to the totalitarian system will result in his alienation. There is no way for a rebel but either being tormented and punished or leaving the system behind taking refuge in other systems. He chooses the second way since he sees his freedom in art regardless of its consequent isolation and alienation from his society, particularly from his own family and friends.

Conclusion

The educational system, represented in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, represses and destroys the individual’s talents through denying individuality and focusing on masses in particular. The protagonist of the novel, Stephen Dedalus, faces double trouble through experiencing education in a totalitarian system of education. He could be another victim of this system if he did not have that process of transformation, thanks to his curiosity, sensitivity and private world. In fact, the educational system deprived him of his private world, denied his individuality and imposed a fabricated identity on him. In spite of his earlier submission, Stephen acts like a political rebel challenging the totalitarian system and questions his acquired codes and principles. He cannot cope with the tyrannical unifying system of education that denies any difference and any aspect

of individuality. He can either stay in the system or leave it. While the former results in constant torment and punishment, the latter bring about isolation. Stephen prefers isolation and consequently alienation through leaving the totalitarian system hoping for discovering his individuality and distinctiveness in art. The Messiah of art saved Stephen, but there might be a lot of Stephens have been sacrificed on the altar of the devouring god of totalitarian Education.

مبدء التعليم الشمولي الاستبدادي في رواية صورة الفنان كشاب

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشمولية الاستبدادية، التعليم، الهوية

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الملخص

التعليم هو احد القضايا المهمة التي لها تاثير مباشر في حاضر ومستقبل الحضارة البشرية. الهدف من هذا البحث هو كشف التاثير العميق للنظام الشمولي الاستبدادي للتعليم على حياة ستيفن بطل رواية الكاتب جيمس جويس. تاثير النظام في تجريد البطل من حريته الشخصية ومحو هويته الشخصية هي من الامور التي تتطرق اليها البحث ايضا. البحث يطبق النظرية السياسية المتعلقة بمبدء السياسة الشمولية والاستبدادية، المعتمدة على الايديولوجية، للكاتب الالماني هانا ارندت. النظريات السياسية في هذا البحث يطبق على المؤسسات التعليمية في الرواية للكشف عن دورها في زرع الايديولوجية وبعض الافكار الاستبدادية في عقول الطلاب والتي تحرمهم من تجربة حياة الطفولة. ستيفن شاب انعزالي وحساس يعيش حياة متذبذبة بين عالمه الخاص الملهم في خياله وعالم الواقع القاسي المرير. البحث ايضا يسلط الضوء على دور النظام في خلق هوية موحدة لجميع الافراد ونهج ستيفن طريقه الخاص لخلق هويته الشخصية وتحولها. من خلال البحث تبين ان ستيفن من خلال شعوره المتزايد بالتشرد والوحدة ان يحرر نفسه من كل الالتزامات في حياته من الناحية الاجتماعية والعائلية والدينية وان يتبنى اتجاها جديدا في الحياة مستقلا الا هو اتجاه الفن.

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